



via pacis

Newsletter of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community



Chiapas Report

A History of the Chiapas Project



by Richard Flamer

The roots of my work with the Chiapas Project and SYJAC, Skola'el Yul'un Jlumaltic, A.C., (an acronym for "Service to our People" in Tzo Tzil) go back to 1986 and my work with the Diocese of San Cristobal and their work with Guatemalan refugees in camps along the Mexican-Guatemalan border. At that time, I was working as a roving photographer with Fr. Javier Ruiz, Sister Josefina de La Torre Borbon, Don Marcello Cruz and tangentially Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia who was the Bishop at the time.

The refugees returned to Guatemala and I went off on a journey to try and make a life of domesticity which didn't work very well. SYJAC, however, was born in those years while the refugees were returning. As a response to the increasing marginalization and the greater volume of indigenous expulsions from traditional communities, SYJAC was incorporated as a non-profit group to work with the more than 75,000 indigenous people who had been expelled from their communities. Of these, 30,000 were living on the fringe of San Cristobal de Las Casas.

About the time that Sister Josefina was working at organizing these exiled Indians, a series of events were simultaneously occurring. Habitat for Humanity came to Chiapas. An ecumenical peace group was trying to work with the communities responsible for the evictions and the expelled to return some families back to the communities. The center for Human Rights called Fray Bartolome de Las Casas became more effective and started initiating publicity campaigns and court actions to establish a human right for the indigenous to live in peace in their land of origin. Land invasions by other groups (again, expelled but some had organized in different fashions) to claim land owned by the government and large absentee landholders.

On the Board of Directors for SYJAC, the individuals, including many of my

friends from earlier years, began to try and organize a nonprofit group with a base in San Cristobal that would try and work with some of these basic needs around them. A decision was made to make the effort ecumenical in its outlook and working so many of the expelled included evangelical or protestant groups. Don Samuel Ruiz, who is on the Board, is famous for his human rights work. Sister Josefina has had a long history of working day to day with the indigenous people in their daily spiritual struggles. Father Javier continues to be a parish priest in a state that is at war. The son of Don Marcello, now a college and seminary graduate, Sabas Cruz Garcia, began working at SYJAC with Sister Josefina. When Sister Josefina was assigned to the mountains of Guerrero, Sabas took over the day to day reigns of SYJAC along with Sister Clo who also has years of experience working on a daily basis with the indigenous, mostly with the Tsel Tal.

The dreaded "L" word needs to rear its head. Liberation theology is now entrenched in the world. Whether its practitioners are harassed or ignored, the fact of the matter is that there is a place for the theology in our modern times. In no other place in the world that I have ever visited is the practice of liberation so evident as in Chiapas. The role of SYJAC, day to day, is at the heart the practice of liberation theology.

In the year 2000, I returned to Chiapas, along with Fr. Frank Cordaro (anti-war activist) and Bob Wright (retired union activist). We were met by Sabas and toured the half finished Community Center of SYJAC. As we roamed throughout indigenous communities in Chiapas, it became clear to me where I would be spending the next few years of my life.

I returned to the Des Moines Catholic Worker where I had been working

on rebuilding the houses within the community. Fr. Frank and I began raising money, eventually collecting enough to return to finish the first floor of the Community Center and allowing me to spend time with Sabas and Sister Clo in trying to work out the role that the soon to be incorporated Chiapas Project could play in their work.

Delegations became a major focus as we decided that for first world people to see the faith, the joy, the poverty, the discrimination, the injustice, it was necessary to set up a system of education. The delegations bring people down for a week to see what it is that I have seen for the last 15 years. Additionally, my photography has continued to play a role as I have set up exhibitions of the work to go along with talks as well as independent exhibitions.

The SYJAC team asked us to help them with finding money for further development of programs that they had been questioned about by the people they serve. We began first with a day care center which was opened last year. Like most of our work, it is messy and not very well defined. We have anywhere from 3 to 15 children a day and we usually provide food for those children twice a day. (Sometimes it's only once if they have all eaten before coming to the Center.)

This last year (2002) we have finished two physical structures on the second floor of the Center and the Sewing Cooperative is now open though we need furniture, sewing machines, etc. Sister Clo has two classes of around 20 women each who now can meet upstairs with lots of light, etc. The Wood Shop is finished but not open yet. I need to get back down there to teach the use of the machines to young men and women who are already making furniture but right now have no access to other than hand tools.

Next year we hope to open a small computer cooperative for young people to learn the basics of computer skills. Again, it is what the indigenous people that we work with are asking about.

In the outreach program, we are working with a community in Yajalon to help them in their efforts at fundraising. We are working with the physical development of a community called 5 de Marzo where we have helped them get started on building a church in concrete block, started a drainage system using some of the newly trained engineers from the Yajalon project, helped with Habitat for Humanity housing, etc. Additionally, we are working with a hospital in Altamirano (San Carlos) which is run by a group of nuns of St. Vincent de Paul.

Everything done by the Chiapas Project goes through or is in association with SYJAC. SYJAC has asked for our help in raising funds, in organizing, etc. We are truly partners.

No one making the day-to-day decisions is actually paid, though it is a dream of all of us that a subsistence wage could be paid to Sabas, Sister Clo. I do receive \$1,000 per month stipend from the funds I raise. The teacher for the Day Care Center is paid, and we hope to have a maintenance man/woodshop teacher who is paid as well.

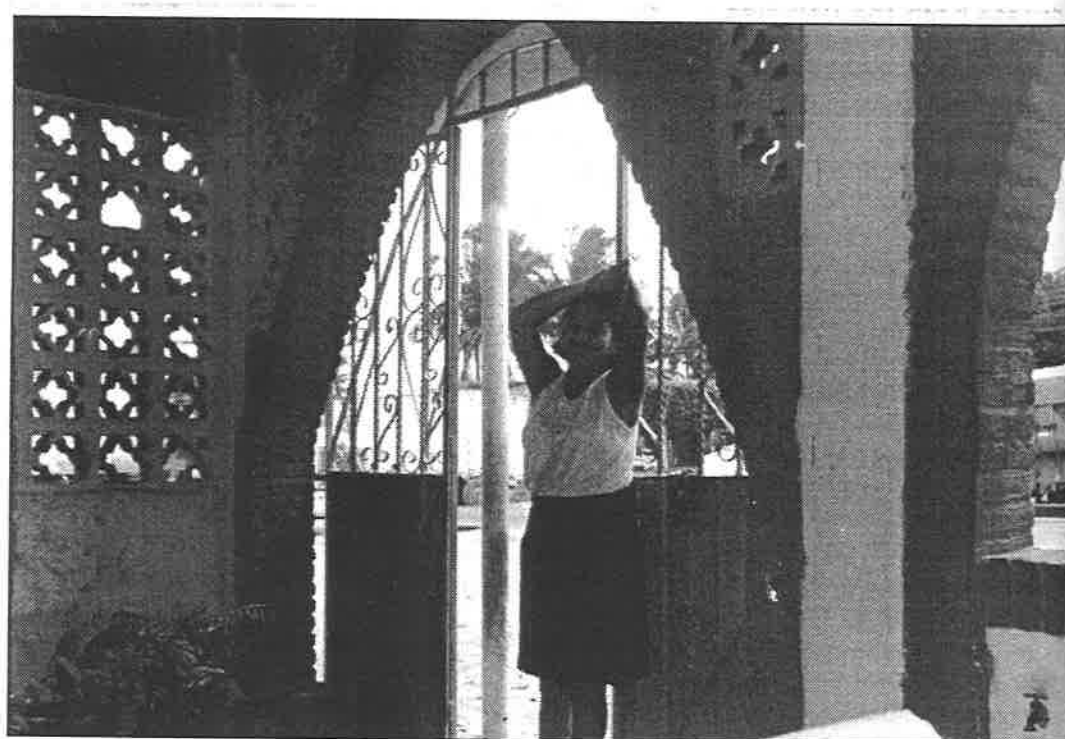
The Chiapas Project is now a non-profit with IRS status to help us raise funds. For the next six months, I will be raising funds with grant applications, talks to churches, photo exhibitions, etc. The Board of Directors, a fine bunch of people with great hearts and good skills, will eventually be taking over the majority of the fundraising while I return to San Cristobal to live full time.

I expect that I will be doing construction most of the time with an eye towards building community in any form.

Pensamiento de un Niño

It isn't the fault of the culture
 Nor is it the fault of education, of understanding
 Nor is it for the poverty
 But runs in my veins.
 Or perhaps it is for my dark skin or my black eyes,
 It could be my black hair, I don't know
 But when I pass on the street, when I am in school,
 It is always a sign that I don't understand,
 I don't know because I cannot express myself.
 I have to be an Indian, this I say as if to be an
 Indian is a sin.
 I don't know why they say this, but I think it is
 because I am poor.
 I have a pair of shoes, I am happy that I am not
 bare-footed.
 I don't have many clothes, and what I have is old
 but clean.
 I wash with water and soap like everyone else.
 But they continue calling me Indian.
 I don't understand, I don't feel bad to be an In-
 dian.
 I have an origin, a culture that I am proud to be
 a part of.
 I have a father, although all the time he is drunk.
 And sometimes he hits my mother, my poor mother
 who is always working
 Washing clothes for another to give us something
 to eat.
 I am proud of my mother, I feel bad to see her thus
 What am I able to do? I am a child, after all.
 I am a child that needs help,
 A child that has hope of setting forth.
 I am a child with a big heart because I have no
 sins.
 My view is clean, my words as well, so says my
 mother.
 I am a child that wants to overcome, to become
 educated, to cultivate my ideas.
 I don't know how I will make this dream I have
 come true.
 I don't know if I will do this with the help of my
 mother,
 or with the help of a generous heart to help
 or with the light of God, but I want to move for-
 ward.
 I don't want more screams, nor to be told I am
 stupid, nor to be insulted.
 I want to be heard.
 I am an Indian, but I am a child as well.
 A child that wants peace
 A child that wants love
 A child that wants equality
 A child that wants opportunity
 I am me, a child with faith and hope.

Anonymous but circulating around San Cristobal de las Casas
 amongst the indigenous population of Tzo Tzil and Tsel Tal.
 Translation by Richard Flamer and Araceli Benitez Moya (out of
 Tzo Tzil into Spanish into English).



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The Chiapas Project Mission Statement

The mission of the Chiapas Project is to develop a partnership between the people of the State of Iowa, U.S.A., and the state of Chiapas, Mexico. This partnership will be achieved by implementing the following goals:

- A. Provide educational opportunities for people in Iowa and for people in Chiapas so that individuals in each state will gain an understanding of the spiritual, cultural, and economic realities of both states.
- B. Develop relationships and cooperative efforts with other organizations in both states so that resources and efforts address specific objectives that will improve the quality of life for the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.
- C. Establish an infrastructure to accommodate the physical and material needs of individuals who are visiting in either state in order to meet goal A, B, or both.

Something Tangible

by Richard Flamer

Suffering from a kind of culture shock with my re-entry to the 1st world of the U.S., I was asked by both my conscience and the Board of Directors of our non-profit group to try and summarize what was accomplished on this latest venture to Chiapas. I really am not sure of what to include, and I am sure that I would leave something out, so I decided to try and delineate what was most important for me in these last few months.

The trip down by vehicle was fraught with problems, some of which we solved, some not. Charley Kidder (a friend of 25 years) and Lilia Garcia (a friend since last year when she went on the delegation) met me in Omaha, and we drove two vehicles to the border town of Brownsville where I meet with Customs People from Mexico to figure out a way of entering legally so that we could donate both the vehicles and the contents (tools, computers, etc.) to the Syjac center in San Cristobal. We were told to enter "in transit" and then legalize everything as a donation once we were in San Cristobal rather than arrange the transfer of the "in transit" status at the Southern Border with Guatemala. WRONG.... After over 3 months of negotiation, we still don't have most of the tools and neither of the vehicles (one got sold because it was too "new" to be donated). We managed to get over half the tools to the center along with the sewing machines but the computers had to leave the country (because of the new regulations of NAFTA), so I donated them to a Priest at the border who got them to his church program of working with street kids on computers...

The time that Sabas (one of the co-directors of Syjac) and I spent on donations with all the paperwork, etc. was not lost time. By the time we were finished, or nearly so,

Sabas had made 3 treks to Mexico City (19 hours one way by bus) and I had spent over 3 weeks at the Southern Border. Mexico, as a country, is changing rapidly. The old ways of Bribes, etc. are altering the day-to-day life of all of the Mexicans we talked with. The problems include the new ways of trying to impose laws that have been on the books for years that no one ever

asked by Sor Maite to run interference for her with the Dutch Architect/Supervisor who seemed to be much more interested in Architecture made whole than in what the hospital wanted, i.e. he had, despite the urgings of Sor Maite, failed to design a dining room or kitchen into the general plan because he could not find space for them. Likewise, space for

And she started into a routine of visiting the babies in the Guarderia (day care center) working with Sister Clo and working with me on construction projects.

I rehired Eugenio and hired Enrique (the brothers of Sabas) to start the second floor construction which included a new sewing center (the wing is 48 feet long by 16 feet wide with lots of light from windows on two sides - a

Along the way, we repaired some of the plumbing, built some furniture for the Guarderia, Claire did some benches for the Sewing Center, we built some shelves for the kitchen, and repaired and added new electrical fixtures.

During this same period, we became involved with another community of "los expulsados", or the expelled. A community called 5 de Marzo on the other edge of San C. from where we had been working. It is a community of 490 families that invaded public lands seven years ago. They have stayed united through the wonderful efforts of Sister Maura (a member of the same congregation as Sister Clo). Sor Maura asked me to come and help the people design a church of concrete block (she had received a donation of 10,000 pesos from the former bishop, Don Samuel Ruiz) to replace their tiny wooden structure. I met with the representatives and started working on building the new church over the existing wooden structure with the materials paid for by Don Samuel and most labor paid for by the community. We managed to get the front face built with the start of two sidewalls before the materials and money ran out. I think it is a long-term project for me.

While at the 5 de Marzo community, I also worked with Mauri on getting Sabas and Syjac involved so that they found two



enforced, the changing laws of NAFTAA, the minds of Beaucrats who need to understand that they are no longer Tzars but servants, etc. I think, with our work, we helped play a role in some of that change. We are continuing to try and work on getting the goods, etc. back to San Cristobal.

Once in San Cristobal, Charley flew back to Omaha, Lilia went up to Altamirano to serve with the nuns of St. Vincent de Paul at the San Carlos Hospital (she's an x-ray tech). Mostly, though, she hung out and worked in the Nursery with newborns and young mothers.

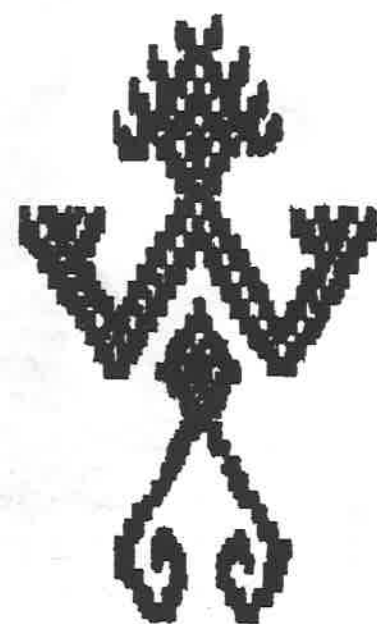
I made a couple of trips to Altamirano and the hospital to help with the construction of the new hospital down the block from the old one (being built by a Dutch foundation). With my construction experience, I was

doctors to live, a morgue, etc. The young architect and I worked together so that he eventually found room for all of the needed structures (going underground for the morgue, a covered patio for the dining area next to a kitchen space while going off the block to another area a block away for the doctor's quarters).

While at the hospital, I continued taking photos of the flowers, the chapel, and many of the patients. I tried to explore the physical needs of this wonderful place that dispenses health via love.

Back at San Cristobal, Claire Quiner arrived and we set up a routine, of sorts, for her work with the poor. She began her Spanish classes and started working at the Community Center (Syjac). We worked on a sign for the outside of the center in wood (which came out beautifully).

shed roof). We ran new electrical circuits to provide power for lighting, sewing machines, etc. Additionally, we built a tool storage room and a carpentry workshop on the second wing (48 feet by 18 feet total size). Eugenio and Enrique laid over 3000 blocks for the two wings and then did a smooth coat over the entire structure. They worked continuously on the building while I worked at some projects, then took off to work outside the center on other projects (i.e. I did the carpentry for roofing, ordered the materials, the doors, installed the wooden windows, etc.). Talk about more bang for your buck? With the help of Claire, Eugenio, Enrique, Paul Allen and his wife Billie, we managed to build two wings on the center for a little more than \$23,000. I was truly in awe.



And To Think that I Saw It on Tlaxcala Street!

by Billie Greenwood

Apologies to Dr. Suess for twisting the title of his book about Little Marco, whose dad told him to watch for interesting sights on the way to and from school. But all Marco saw was a boring old horse and wagon. Imagine if he could report a zebra pulling the wagon...or maybe, if the zebra was pulling a chariot. Finally he decides that he saw an elephant enthroned with a ruby-bedecked rajah! "Say! That makes a story that no one can beat, / When I say that I saw it on Mulberry Street."

Unlike Marco, I never had to use my imagination to find the unusual on

Tlaxcala Street, the calle on which I lived and worked in San Cristobal while volunteering for The Chiapas Project.

I thought about Marco when I walked to and from and wondered if people would think I was just making up my stories of the strange, and wonderful, and horrible things I saw. "And to think that I saw it on Tlaxcala Street!" I mused to myself.

Tlaxcala—(a magical name, be sure to say it aloud.)—is the main artery through which the displaced indigenous, who settled in a bad pocket of urban sprawl, need to pass to get into town. They moved to the

city for various reasons, none of which were happy: war, oppression, and poverty. But, many maintain their native garb in their new slum home. Women dress in every color of the rainbow, in costumes that would be right at home in National Geographic magazine. Men use walking sticks, wear straw hats, carry unbelievable loads until out of sight. I loved to greet the passers-by; they found me as unusual a sight on Tlaxcala Street as I did them.

Since owning a car is a luxury only for the richest, many took a

microbus, a few rode bikes, but most people walked on Tlaxcala, barefoot or in the cheapest of plastic sandals.

Often they walked in family groups. Very often girls or women of all ages walked carrying a baby or even a toddler slung on her back. I noticed how affectionately people walked along together: couples of all ages arm-in-arm, children with arms around each other, two girls hand-in-hand.

There are three tortillarias in the first three blocks of Tlaxcala. They all sell a kilo (2.2 pounds) of fresh, warm tortillas for less than 50 cents. Strangely enough to our U.S. minds, that's a lot of money there.

Paul and I were thinking life in Mexico is pretty cheap when our "dinner and a movie" evening cost us a total of \$5.00 on 2-for-1 night. Then we realized that was an entire day's wage for a laboring man with a day job. What parent could afford to blow their whole day's pay on a movie?

A little river flows under Tlaxcala, between our apartment and the Center where we volunteered. It always smelled. Once Clare Quiner, another volunteer, showed me two dead pigs floating downstream. When we didn't have water at the Center for three days straight, the guys had to haul up this river water to mix construction cement. Worse, I often noticed the poor washing off in the stream and sometimes washing their clothes there, too.

Our simple apartment was comfortable. But just down the street from us was a crowded cluster of tin roof, one-room shack/homes, lacking any indoor plumbing or flooring, surrounded by red mud. The gap between the rich and the poor is clear on Tlaxcala. And we passed it every day to and from our work.

From Tlaxcala it's easy to admire the richly green-forested mountains that surround San Cristobal, a gorgeous view to eyes accustomed to the flat

lowan plains. On Tlaxcala, it's better to look up than down because the street itself is littered with paper and debris, corn cobs, mango pits, beer and liquor bottles.

Drug and alcohol abuse is a problem among the displaced, along with the violence that accompanies it. We stayed inside after dark. In general, however, I always felt safe on Tlaxcala. People recognized us as 'belonging' to the SYJAC Center. Neighbors greeted us with friendly smiles and waves.

I saw the unlikely on Tlaxcala. If my stories sound extreme, they are (unlike little Marco's!) straight fact. I didn't do or accomplish anything on Tlaxcala that somebody else could not have done. But Tlaxcala is in my mind and in my heart now.

My real job is ahead: to make choices on how I use my fabulous income (by their standards) to make a difference to the people of Tlaxcala Street as well as to the folks on all the other streets of the Third World.



by Paul Allen

The Chiapas main activity is la city of San Cr agenda include more, however work being done ticular Chiapas My wife, Billie fortunate enough ence both, th within the city those outside o Most of the tir plenty of work building in San Richard and co constructed in ide a home for of SYJAC and Humanity. Ther to put up and s windows to put ways was a ch more in the Day that could use tional time an Two months t soon there wa catch back to place four hour We did make get out and av Cristobal for however, in o feel for some the story'. Our ence was in a similarly no Cristobal, an four or five hou in this case by l (maybe 100 n We stepped microbus after sleeper, tour called Yajalon Here we wou whirlwind da and viewing a well-organiz helping the people of the outlying moun We began, c enough, by c midnight after few of the wor (Not that we dance, but it IS do so when t 100 other you all located ju bedroom door The followi was up and a sentatives fro villages had w those from to meet with us their accompl their ne central locatio group is calle high on a hill the city. We there, seeing 1) a water s livers potable tively rare springs to neighbor thanks to S Chiapas Proj 2) a multi-f farm operatio is done by yo the surround

Let's Get Cooking

Paul Allen

Chiapas Project's activity is located in the town of San Cristobal. Its location includes quite a bit more, however, than the project being done in that particular Chiapas location.

My wife, Billie, and I were fortunate enough to experience both the projects in the city as well as outside of it.

Most of the time we found work in the new project in San Cristobal that the group and company have constructed in order to provide a home for the activities of SYJAC and Habitat for Humanity. There were roofs put up and second floor walls to put in. There always was a child or two or three in the Day Care Center who could use some additional time and attention.

Months flew by, and there was a plane to take us back to a far-away town four hours to the north. We did make the time to visit and away from San Cristobal for a few days, however, in order to get a taste for some of 'the rest of the story'. Our best experience was in another place, nearly north of San Cristobal, and again only five hours distant, but accessible by bus or 'combi' (the 100 miles away?). We stepped out of the bus after arriving at this quieter, tourist-free town called Yajalon.

Here we would spend three wind days of visiting and viewing a community's organized efforts at helping the more needy people of the town and its surrounding mountain villages. We began, celebratively enough, by dancing until midnight after a meal with a few of the workers/directors. But that we don't like to dance, but it IS a lot easier to dance when the music and other young dancers are located just outside your room door.)

The following morning it was up and at 'em. Representatives from many of the villages had walked in to join us from town in order to meet with us and show us their accomplishments, and their needs. The central location of the whole project is called 'the Ranch,' located on a hill at the edge of the city. We spent the day there, seeing:

1) a water system that delivers potable water, a relatively rare luxury, from springs above the neighborhoods below, thanks to SYJAC and the Chiapas Project;

2) a multi-faceted organic farm operation whose work is done by young men from the surrounding mountains

who volunteer their time and sweat, in exchange for room and board and a chance for an education in the local schools which their home villages lack:

3) a coffee crop which, beyond the edible foods they grow and eat, serves to provide a little cash flow to help fund other projects and needs;

4) worm beds and 'recyclable' latrines (with a little lime and time and some wood ash, human waste becomes excellent fertilizer for coffee trees) to help the farm crops;

5) the use of wood-burning cooking-stoves made largely of clay that can provide anyone with a healthy, efficient means of cooking, which uses only 1/2 the normal amount of fire-wood and which also vents the smoke and carbon from the home, costing only about \$20.

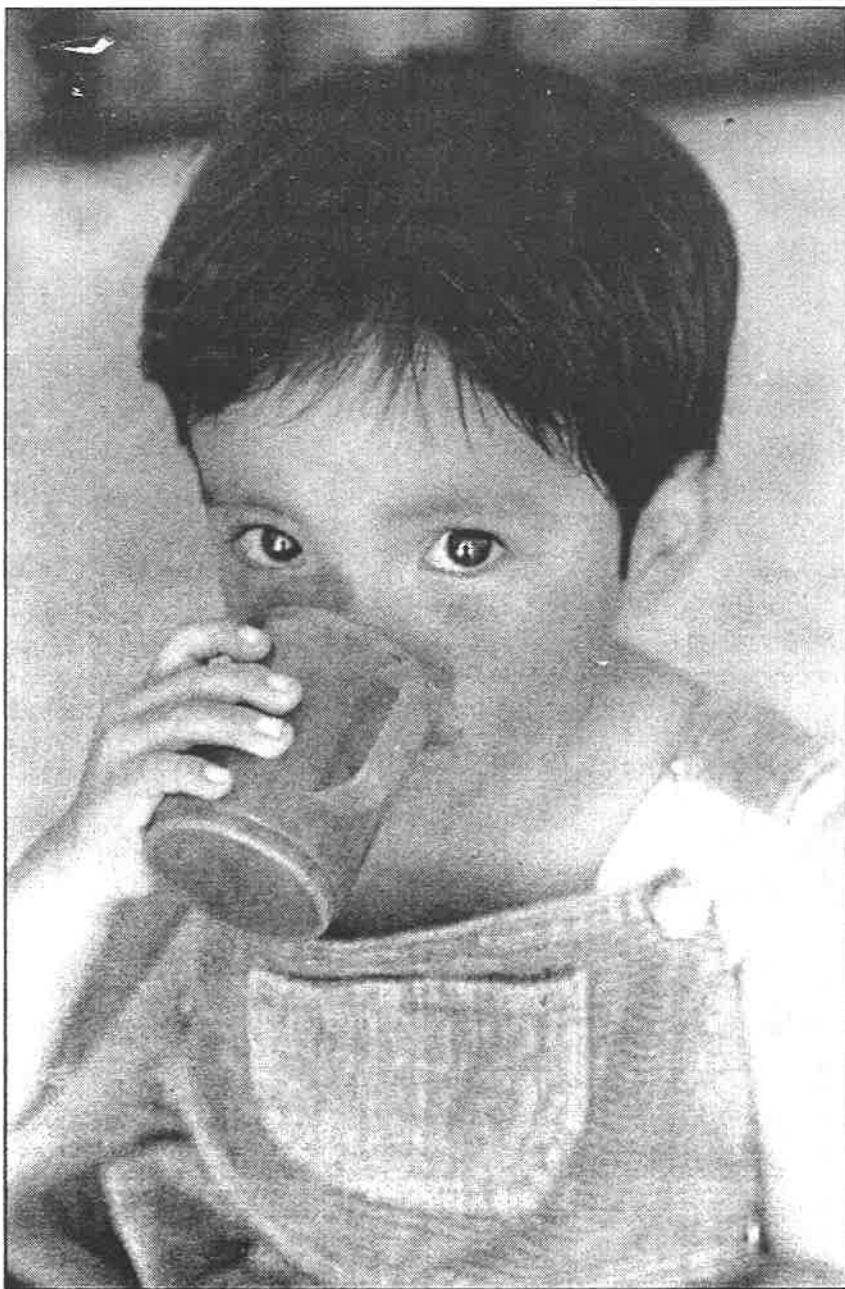
There's lots more to add and explain, but I'd like to linger a little longer instead on item 5 above because the next day Billie and I accompanied two of the ranch guys out to a town even farther into the hills where they/we would build one of these clay stoves — under the watchful eyes of many of the area village's handymen who showed up "to learn how", and a few nuns from the clinic where the model stove was to be made. For a couple of hours, the group of us sifted sand and mixed clay and a half bag of cement into a 'mud' concoction and pounded it into a simple nearly square form. As this mud set, it was hollowed into a clever system of fire-pot and a few tunnels that led to circled openings made the same size as the nun's griddle and pots. !Ay, Caramba! -in a few days it would be ready to fire up, complete with a home-made (from back at the Ranch) tin chimney.

We were sold on the idea: its 'appropriate' technology, materials, labor and cost (though low to us beyond the reach of most campesinos). Literally hundreds of families in the area, especially the moms and little kids who spend so many hours indoors around the stove, yearn for such a luxury. The alternative is usually a three-stone open fire inside the one-room houses. (cough, cough).

Billie and I talked about it on our way back to San Cristobal a day or two later, after other similar good experiences with the folks of Yajalon. All our time there had been cause for optimism and enthusiasm. Here was a group of campesinos who had organized to directly target some of their most basic needs, especially for those from mountain farms and villages where it is becoming increasingly difficult to make it, i.e. survive. She

and I talked about helping to fund this stove project and about convincing others of its value, about helping build stoves and about teaching others to build them, about spreading the idea beyond the Yajalon area of Chiapas.

There are many, many worthy needs in this world of ours, but certainly here is one of them, we feel, one that has many happy and healthy consequences. We hope that money sent to The Chiapas Project can be earmarked for this "let's-get-cooking project" in Yajalon (or wherever else in Chiapas), and we hope that the two of us can continue to be an ongoing part of it, with our future time and energy and money, si Dios quiere. Anybody else out there interested?





*To give and not to take,
that is what makes people
human.*

*Ideals and not deals,
That is what makes people
human.*

Peter Maurin

Casa Fray Bartolomé

by Richard Flamer

After a period of four years with the Des Moines Catholic Worker and a bit more than 14 years in Central America (mostly as a photojournalist), I can heartedly attest that the Catholic Worker in Coatepec, Veracruz, is a blessed place. It is a community in the finest sense.

Lupe met me at the door when I recently visited on my way driving out of Mexico for the Chiapas Project based in San Cristobal de las Casas. Luis Mora, husband of Lupe, father to Emily and Laura, was there but bustling around to get to a march on time. Of course, Emily and Laura actually are the rulers of the house which also includes Jorge, Martin, and a couple of young people going to high school who would normally reside in Chiapas but because of the war and resistance, haven't a place in the education system of Southern Mexico.

With a weekly radio program on an independent local radio station, the local community involvement, a family, one would think the plate is full at their house, yet they find time to work in Chiapas organizing with the communities in resistance (sometimes labeled as Zapatista) to form cooperatives, organize health campaigns, women's cooperatives, etc.

Since our work has the opportunity to overlap in Chiapas, I had been in correspondence with Lupe and Luis to try and visit to exchange ideas and experiences. The Chiapas Project works of mercy include a community center designed around the communities of "Los Expulsados" who are those who have been expelled from their communities, around 35,000 in San Cristobal alone, that now houses the regional office of Habitat for Humanity, a Day Care Center for single mothers, a Cooperative Sewing

Center and a Carpenter Shop.

A wonderful day of that included some common problems (people who want to but haven't sufficient Spanish so those living there spend more time translating than working), our common joys (working with the poor is truly inspiring and some of our misadventures (the constant dilemma of raising funds).

A short note might be appropriate at this stage. For those of you unfamiliar with Mexican culture, the Veracruz Catholic Worker is an anomaly. The country of Mexico is changing rapidly in all facets of life but has not much of a consistent middle class. There are in effect two classes: the rich and the poor. The middle class is starting to grow but they are struggling. Most of the support for Catholic Worker in the U. S. comes from the middle class. The conditions of food, clothing, shelter and money that people survive on at the Catholic Worker in Coatepec are augmented by the community members who can work part time to support the works of mercy in our houses. For the Catholic Workers in Veracruz there are no such safety nets. Practically speaking, they get most of their money from the U. S. They are always struggling. With our work at the Chiapas Project, I came back for six months a year to raise money.

If you know of someone who could help, a Catholic Worker, a friend of the Veracruz Worker could surely use \$25 a month. Money can be sent to Guadalupe Guzman, Britania Street, Los Angeles, California, 90001 USA.

As I was leaving Coatepec, thinking of new friends, I was reminded of the universal message of the Gospel and I prayed for the community in Veracruz to have more part of the love and sense of the Christ.

TH

by Richard

A grand poem in The Chiapas of education. I am not educating say that no one to Chiapas remained unseven or eightence, we were there, try to delegates to a work and the with whom we poverty, the tangible aspect of the community. Va have written of their time gion, but there are those people. Shage 13 is the est to come. age 17 came egation and c us this last months.

The delegation a refreshing what we do e come to vis come to recog ure in my ma difficult time come from the are not part My difficulty the lack of S good people come and hel for me is that shown me th time translati with the peop to serve. The a way for p about the cu

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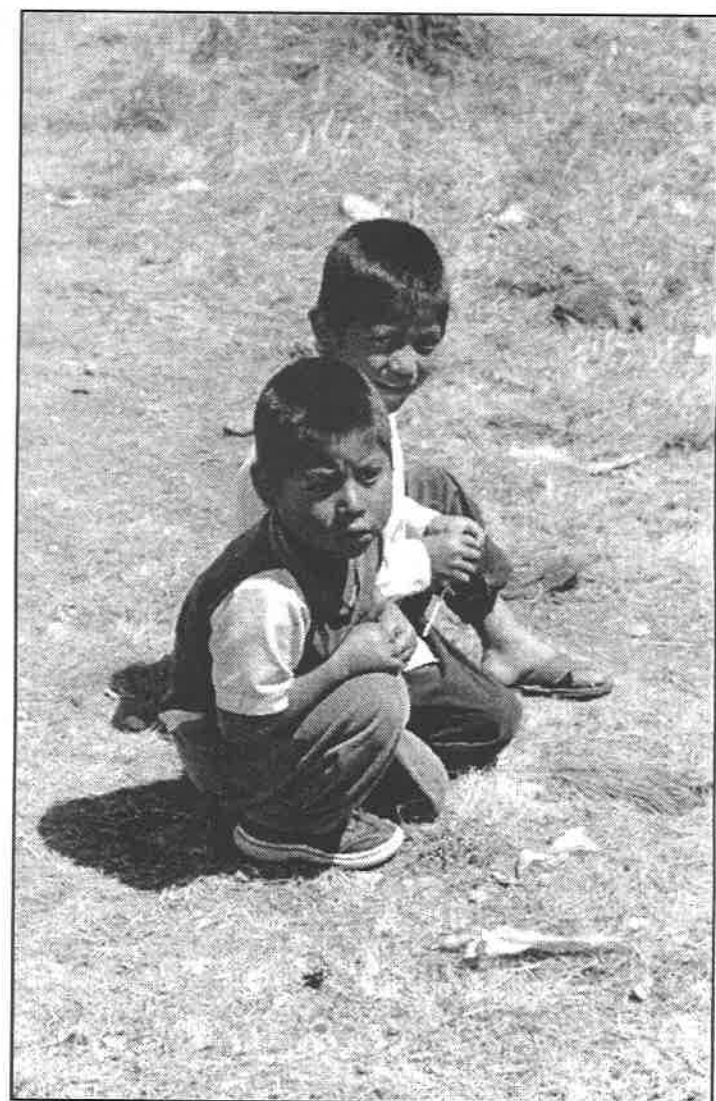
Day Care Center of SYJAC

by Araceli Benitez Moya
translated by Richard Flamer

The Day Care Center of SYJAC has children that for the majority cannot count on the love of a father but only that of a mother. However, they felt happy with the chance to come to the Center where they can be with little friends that are the same age, playing with their time together.

And they eat happily also without realizing they are learning. For example, when they work with the "plastilina", they are learning to play and talk with others. All this helps in their development, now that they are learning many things that after they will utilize when they get to kindergarten and for them it means they will not have trouble adapting to the ambience of school. The children that come to SYJAC are children that are of low means and that have mothers that need to work as domestic employees or in washing clothes all in order to feed and dress their children.

Each time that there are more children it means more little friends so that the children do not feel alone. Sometimes in their family they receive no comprehension of love, but in SYJAC, we try to give and accompany them in understanding. In all this discord, this tender view they represent, this innocence that reflects the uncertainty of their lives they begin to discover, among the uneasiness, the caprices and smiles of life. They are there to give and receive joy, hope, faith, and love that will change this world and for that they are able to be happy and able to live in a better world.



The Delegations

by Richard Flamer

grand portion of our work the Chiapas Project is that education. With delegations I am never sure just who I am educating whom, but I can say that no one who has come from the U.S. has remained unchanged. With a seven or eight day experience, we who mostly live here, try to expose the deluges to a sampling of our work and the lives of those with whom we work. Of the tangible aspects of building, the complexities of life in Chiapas. Various delegates have written with great hope their time visiting in the region, but the very best works are those of the young people. Shana Smrcina at age 13 is thus far the youngest to come. Claire Quiner at age 17 came once on the delegation and come back to join this last year for five months.

The delegations for me are a refreshing way to revisit what we do each time people come to visit. Yet, I have come to recognize a great failure in my makeup. I have a difficult time when visitors come from the U.S. when they are not part of a delegation. My difficulty usually involves the lack of Spanish by those good people who want to come and help. The problem is that experience has shown me that I spend more time translating than working with the people we are trying to serve. The delegations are a way for people to learn about the culture and I can

devote my time and my brain to working on making the delegation experience meaningful. It seems that I can either think and work in Spanish or in English but going back and forth makes me have to empty my brain.

In this year of 2002, we had three delegations which were all small but all packed with interest. In 2003, we intend to schedule four delegations but we plan on having more. With three or more people, we can put a delegation together if we have a three-week lead time (more if we have to help make plane reservations.) Of great concern to all involved with the Chiapas Project is the cost of these delegations. With the \$700 we ask for the seven days, we pay all but about 10% in costs of hiring transport, housing (we work with the hotels which are lovely but also the owners are very active with social justice issues.), meals (which somehow play an inordinate role when held in common to sort of go over the day's events), translators, and various unusual expenses (when we enter into the communities in resistance, we need to apply for permission a couple of days ahead of time usually requiring paperwork which we hire.) This coming year we intend to hire the translators from another Catholic Worker community in Coatepec, Veracruz, to allow them to help support their Worker community.

As for airfare, we have a couple of alternatives. Airfare is not cheap outside the major tourist destinations. A plan

ticket to Mexico City from the Midwest is around \$500 roundtrip while the ticket to Tuxtla Gutierrez or San Cristobal de las Casas has ranged from \$750 to \$1350 round trip. We tried both destinations this last year and found that the trip to Tuxtla seems to be more reliable, but we have a two-hour drive each way to pick people up. The trek to San Cristobal is usually the same price but requires an overnight stay in Mexico City and is only punctual about half the time. Finally though, for those who have more time than money, we can offer a different solution.

It is possible to get cheap airline tickets to either Cancun or Mexico City followed by a bus ride via the main Southern Line "Cristobal Colon". From the Mexico City airport, it is secure to take a taxi via the kiosk located in the main terminal directly to the Southern Bus station. From the Southern Bus station, it is a 16 to 19 hour bus ride to San Cristobal. From Cancun where there are less security concerns, it is an 18-hour bus ride. The cost of these bus fares changes every six months, but at the moment they are around \$50 each way. If you plan on coming on a delegation and choose to come by bus, please let us know ahead of time and make arrangements for coming a day early and leaving a day later.

2003 Delegation Dates
February 17 – 25
March 15 – 24
April 14 – 21
June 14 – 23

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CHIAPAS PROJECT WISH LIST

1. **Your Prayers!** Without them, none of the rest really matters.
2. **Money** for the following needs:
 - ♦ \$6,000 a year for art/education. Money for arranging exhibits, printing t-shirts, paying costs of newsletter.
 - ♦ \$5,000 a year for scholarships of travel – Plane fare for people to travel from Des Moines to Chiapas and reverse.
 - ♦ \$4,000 a year for maintaining house on Indiana Avenue in Des Moines as Chiapas Center.
 - ♦ \$1,000 a month for small projects through serendipity, i.e. \$12,000. For tuberculosis travel project at San Carlos hospital in Altamirano, \$4500. For latrine project to build five samples in two communities, etc.
 - ♦ Long - term maintenance – that is maintaining \$1,000 for SYJAC for them to continue with their basic costs and \$1,000 stipend for Richard Flamer totalling \$24,000 a year.
 - ♦ \$10,000 for roof over patio to create meeting space (there is no neutral meeting space for the community – only sectarian churches which seem to cause friction). The costs of building a metal roof include beams, lamina, and some fiberglass panels to allow light to enter.
 - ♦ \$6,000 for carpenter project to buy tools (planers, saws, joiners), shelving and benches (most of which can be made there, but wood is expensive), and initial costs of separate funding for teachers as below with sewing project.
 - ♦ \$10,000 for the sewing project to buy 20 new sewing machines (a combination of electric and treadle operated), furniture (tables, benches), miscellaneous equipment/supplies (thread in bulk, cloth, sergers for finish work, repair equipment), and the initial costs of separate funding of teachers who can be in the building while work is being done for formal classes and informal advice (two people alternating with some overlap while formal classes are going on).
 - ♦ \$150,000 for land purchase to include \$30,000 for purchase of land where SYJAC is located (the land is currently on a long term lease but there are occasional problems with the indigenous council which is constantly changing its board make up) and the land to the side (a vacant lot which is also owned by the Indian Council for eventual use as a warehouse for SYJAC/Habitat use to reduce the costs of Habitat houses (i.e. buying in bulk and distributing) with classrooms above to house adult education classrooms – mostly adult literacy programs). \$20,000 for preliminary construction of warehouse space and the final \$100,000 to purchase a house and apartment for use as an expatriate center (Catholic Workers coming to take Spanish), delegation housing and space for the Executive Director to live.

The Chiapas Project, 1310 - 7th St., Des Moines, IA 515-243-0765
Please send contributions to: PO Box 4551, Des Moines, IA 50306
